

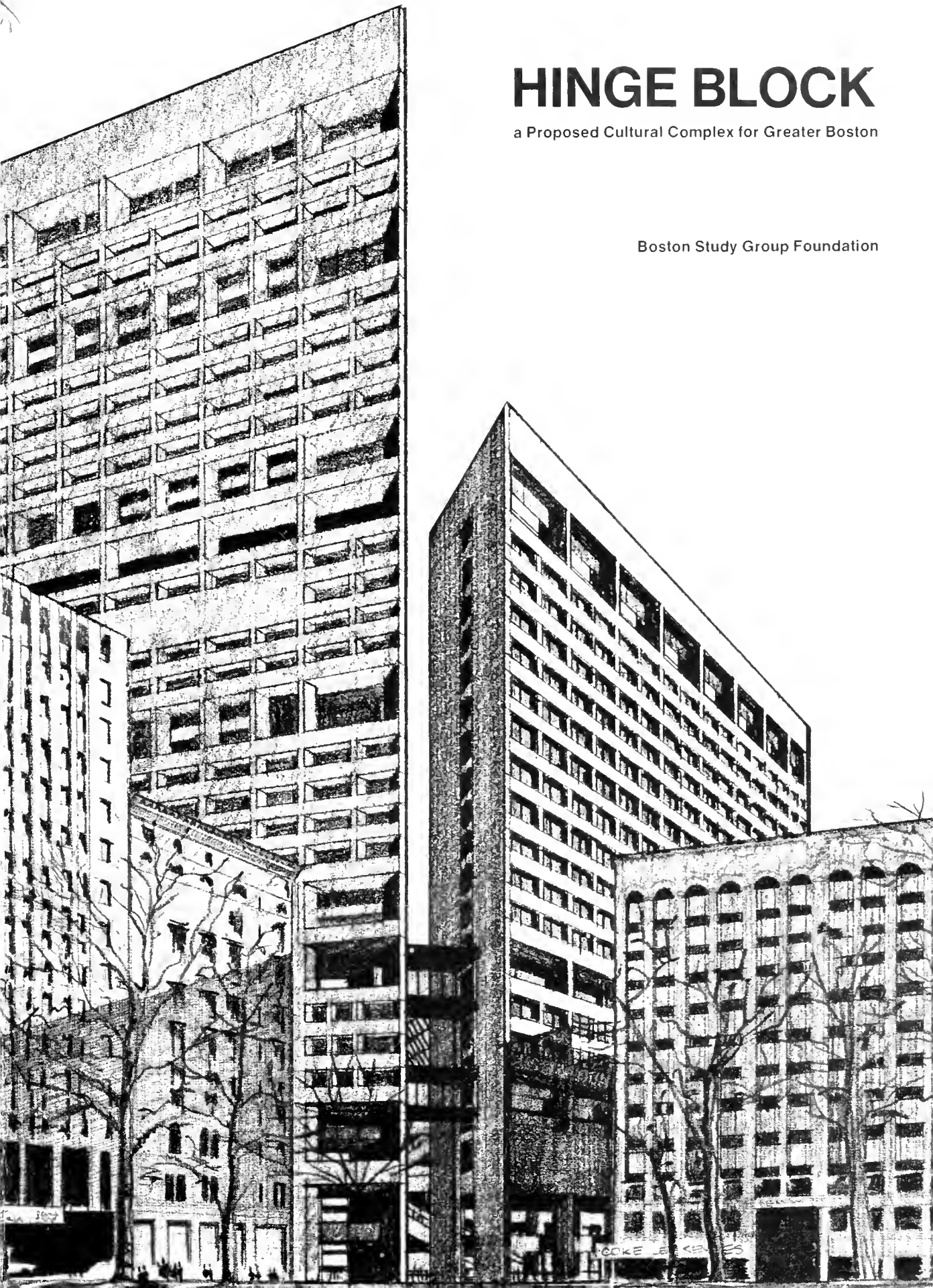
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HINGE BLOCK

a Proposed Cultural Complex for Greater Boston

Boston Study Group Foundation



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Introduction

In February, 1968, a group of Boston business and professional men and a local university administrator, all members of the Boston Study Group, and some of whom also serve as board members of theatre, opera, and arts organizations, formed the Boston Study Group Foundation in order to examine the perilous financial position of several major arts organizations and, if possible, to suggest solutions.

The study group reached the conclusion that financial problems are to a large extent caused by inadequate facilities. It was found that existing physical plants are too small, or outdated, poorly located, or too expensive to operate profitably. It was also found that the resulting financial strain has in turn created artistic problems. Although new facilities emerged as an obvious answer, the high costs of construction have appeared to put this solution beyond reach. As a result, the numerous patrons and benefactors of these arts organizations are finding it difficult to guarantee the continuity of artistic activity that has contributed enormously to the quality of Boston.

The Boston Study Group Foundation proposes the construction of a new kind of arts complex, based on government assistance and on the close integration of large scale real estate development. The overall concept is to provide a solution to cultural housing problems and thus lower operating costs. The solution suggested is a new kind of cooperation of local and federal governments, private enterprise and arts groups.

On January 27, 1969, the Committee of the Permanent Charity Fund voted a grant of four thousand dollars to the Boston Study Group Foundation for developing further the Hinge Block project.

Presented here is a preliminary design that has been developed by Cambridge Seven Associates, Inc. for the purposes of illustrating a general concept. Many broad assumptions have been made, without the benefit of detailed market analysis or program and development studies. As these necessary studies are made in the next phase, specific details of design may change considerably.

Concept

In concept this proposal is a single complex of substantial magnitude and density, in which the proportion of highly profitable land uses (hotel, apartments, offices, large shops) far exceeds the proportion of marginally profitable uses (theatres, galleries, and other arts facilities). This allows facilities for the arts that are difficult to finance by themselves to be built as secondary but integral parts of a much larger and more financially viable real estate development.

The development is conceived as a single structure rather than as a group of individual buildings, so as to take maximum advantage of close integration of activities. When numerous related uses are combined in a single large scale structure, many economies begin to emerge. The sharing by numerous performing arts organizations of lobby space, rehearsal space, workshops, building perimeter, building structure, heating and air conditioning, elevators, escalators, parking and other facilities and services will allow each organization to avoid the high costs of coping with these expensive needs independently. Another important part of the concept is that all arts facilities within the development will be leased from a single non-profit organization. This approach allows each individual arts organization to concentrate its resources on its real creative activity, while utilizing the maximum and most efficient use of interior space within the complex.

The concept of leased rather than owned space also allows important flexibility of production scheduling by the performing arts groups, since access to a wider variety of facilities is made possible. For example, the preliminary conceptual design includes a 2000 seat theatre, suitable for opera and ballet, a 1000 seat theatre for repertory and touring productions, and a 300 seat theatre, suitable for numerous uses by diverse organizations.

Since art galleries are logical close relatives of performing arts facilities, major exhibition space is proposed as an integral part of lobby areas, again for additional economy through overlapping functions. The creation of a large interior space acting as a shared lobby for several theatres (as well as for other activities) allows exhibits or shows to be mounted by museums or galleries without these organizations attempting to carry independently the high costs of appropriate space.

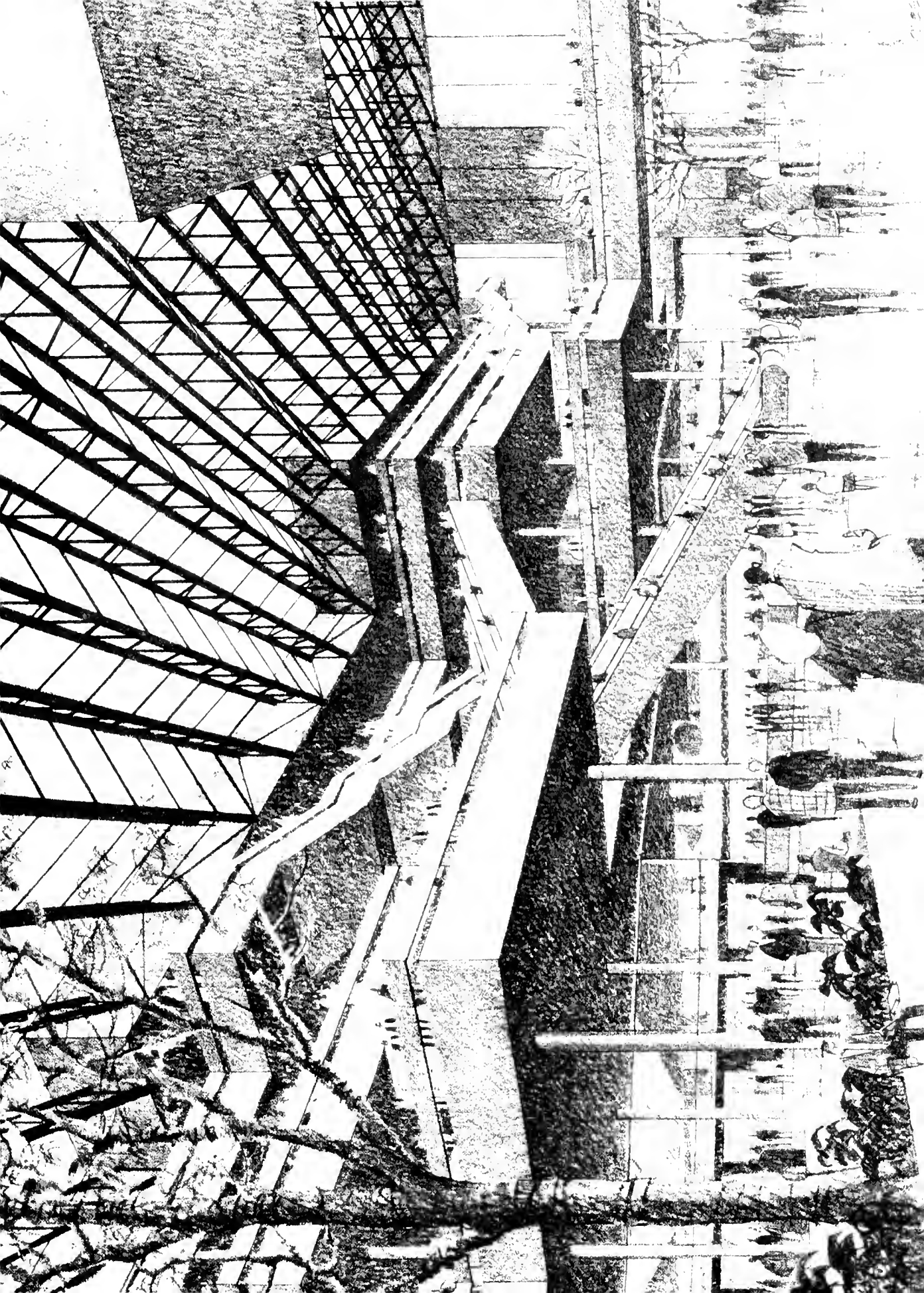
Numerous further advantages of a single structure include the close integration with arts facilities of related enterprises such as restaurants and small shops so that each can add to the success of the other. For

example, if several restaurants are located directly off a theatre lobby, with cocktail lounges that are in effect part of that lobby, theatre patrons can be conveniently served before and after productions, as well as during intermission.

Financial benefits of this mixed development concept have been stressed, but perhaps its most important benefit is the creation of an exciting gathering place for large numbers of people, day and night. An interior space within such a complex can become a major attraction or focus in the downtown, a "place to go."

For example, an evening out in winter weather could include parking one's car only once, checking one's coat only once, cocktails and dinner at one of several restaurants, a play, a ballet, a movie, or a social function at a hotel, a late visit to an art gallery or nightclub, and numerous other choices.

Perhaps the most appealing aspect of this kind of experience is the intense shoulder-rubbing of people with diverse but related interests. When restaurants, nightclubs, cafes, galleries, exhibition halls, shops, theatres, cinemas, museums and so on are combined, the resulting liveliness is a stimulus both to participant (artists and others) and to their patrons – urbanity at its best. A complex of this kind will make a substantial contribution to the quality of life in the city.



Site

Several parcels of land within the City of Boston were evaluated in regard to general location, size, access, availability and other criteria. The most promising possibility to emerge, already set aside by the Boston Redevelopment Authority for entertainment uses, was a city block near the center of the downtown, bordered by Tremont, Boylston, Washington and Stuart Streets.

The Redevelopment Authority's planners had recognized at an early stage in the preparation of the General Plan for the City of Boston that this block, located in the heart of the existing entertainment district, at the edge of the Common, and adjacent to two subway stations, would be an ideal location for mixed development, with an emphasis on facilities for the arts. Proposed land uses included theatres, restaurants, and galleries, and above all, shops, offices, and apartments. Because of its pivotal position between the Central Business District and the Back Bay, the BRA named this parcel the "Hinge Block." The concept illustrated here is, in effect, an extension and modification of the BRA's early planning ideas.



The focal point of the preliminary design is a large interior space, entirely skylit from above, and approximately 250 feet by 150 feet at ground level.

All paths of movement and almost all activities occur in relation to this main space which has a park-like character, flooded with daylight, planted with trees, and protected year-round against the weather.

Almost all public facilities are oriented toward the main interior space which in effect becomes a multi-level lobby and exhibition hall for the entire complex. The visitor arriving at the bottom of the space will see several banks of elevators, at opposite sides of the space, and free-standing escalators rising dramatically in the center. Theatre lobbies are shared platforms extending visibly into the main space. Other platforms within the main space include hotel lounge space, dining terraces, cocktail lounges, restaurants, and gallery exhibition areas.

Virtually the entire volume is available for periodic large scale exhibitions of contemporary art or other exhibitions, some of which might be suspended from the skylight trusses. Substantial floor area for gallery or exhibition use is available at ground level and on the upper theatre platforms.

Retail space is primarily located at ground level, with frontage to the outside streets as well as inwards toward the enclosed plaza. Servicing for the entire complex occurs below street level. Parking is located on two self-parking levels below street level, and on twelve mechanically operated levels above (See drawing P.).

The site can be approached by car, taxi, subway, or on foot. Transit riders enter the main space from a lower concourse connecting the two subway stations at the north side (P1). Drivers enter at Stuart Street, and after depositing their cars, arrive in the main space via a large daylighted opening in the center. (See Drawing G.) Pedestrians enter primarily from three diagonal corners, reflecting the "hinge" function of the site and the diagonal approach from Boston Common. The approach from Boston Common is dramatized by a slot that visually separates the hotel from the apartments, and that allows a generous view into the interior space.

The visitor within the space who rides the main escalators upwards, first arrives at the main theatre level (3), and continuing upwards on escalators and stairs, arrives at upper theatre (5) and balcony levels (7). Via elevators or stairways he can go to any intermediate level, or to the roof level (9), there entering the communications center or the gallery. The gallery uses the

roof at this point as an outdoor exhibition garden.

Hotel facilities frame the overall structure at the west side, with function rooms, dining areas, and lounges at the lower seven levels facing outwards to the street and inwards to the main space (see drawing C-C). Thirteen more floors, containing the hotel units, are located above, facing outwards, west and east (see drawing 19 and C-C).

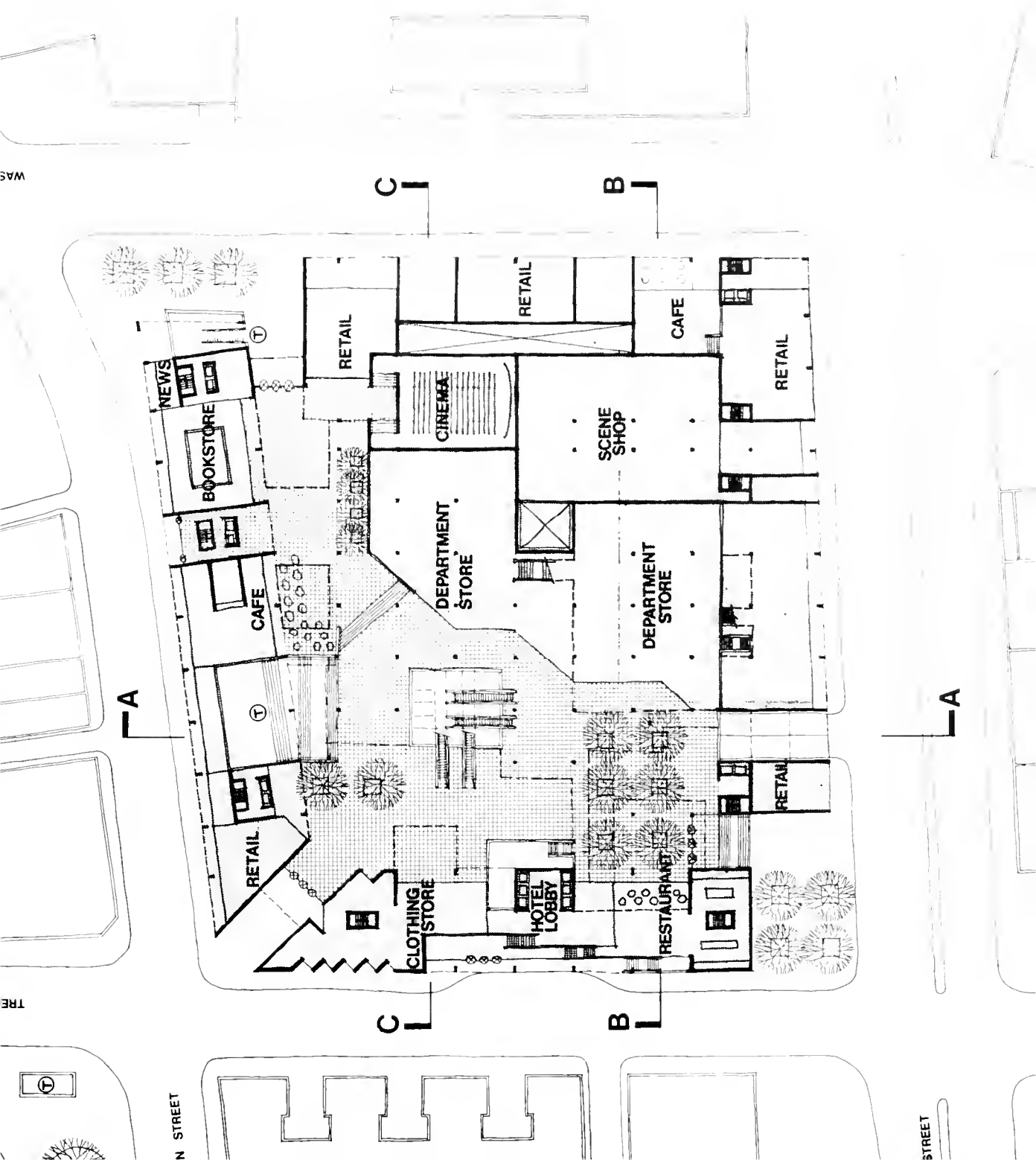
At the north side of the structure, above the subway concourse, and above two floors of retail space, five floors of office and commercial space are oriented inwards to the interior space and outwards toward Boylston Street. Above them are twenty-four additional floors of apartment units, facing north and south over the city (see drawing A-A).

The preliminary design includes, for illustrative purposes, the following: 1600 parking spaces, 480 hotel units, 300 apartment units, 200,000 sq. ft. of office space, 180,000 sq. ft. of retail shopping space at several levels, 40,000 sq. ft. of exhibition and museum space, four restaurants, two night clubs, numerous hotel dining areas, lounges and function rooms, two 300-seat cinemas, one 2000-seat theatre for opera and ballet, one 1000-seat theatre, one 300-seat theatre, rehearsal, shop and office space for the arts organizations, and a communications center for film, TV and radio. Total area approximately 2,200,000 square feet.

HINGE BLOCK

G

GROUND
LEVEL

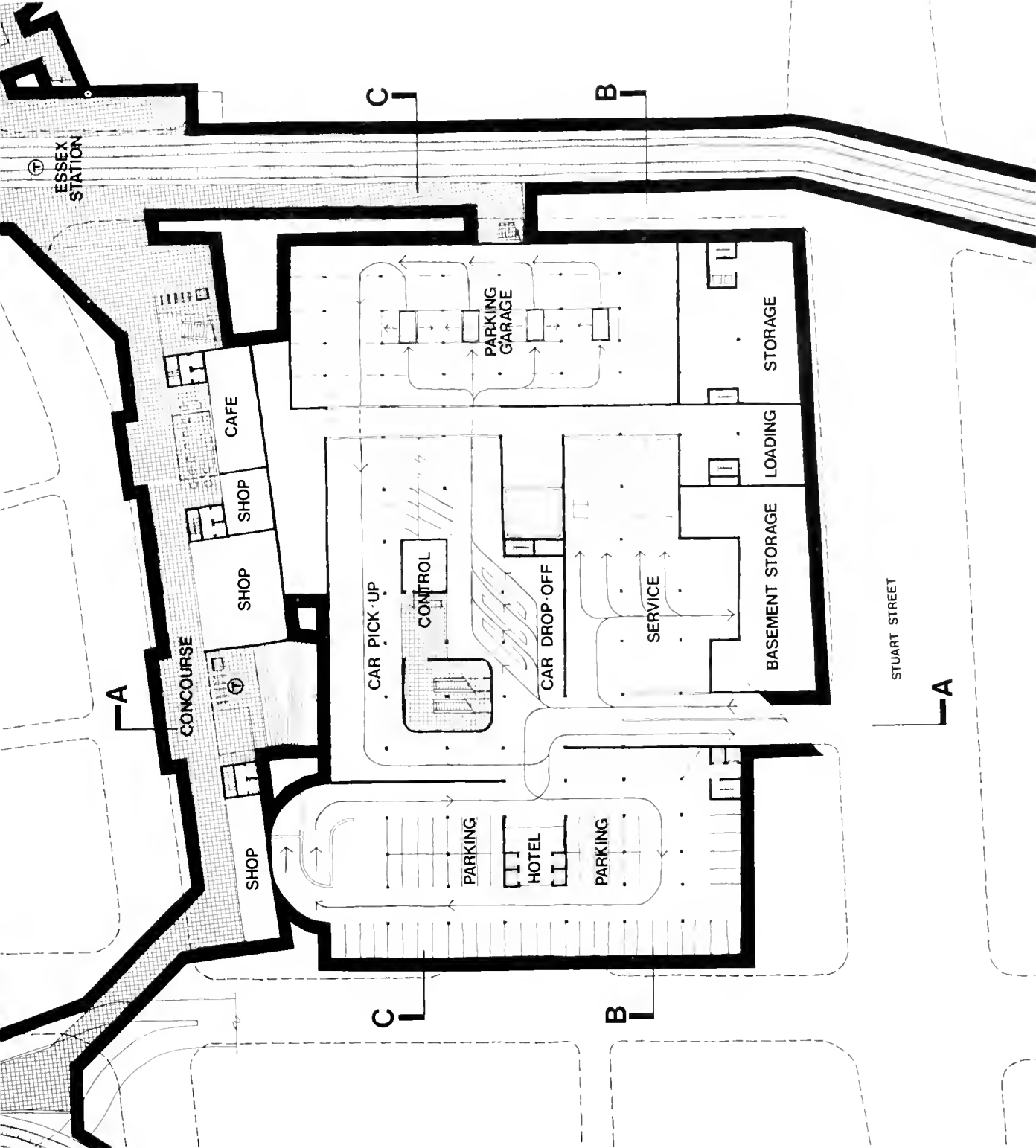


HINGE BLOCK

P1

PARKING
LEVEL

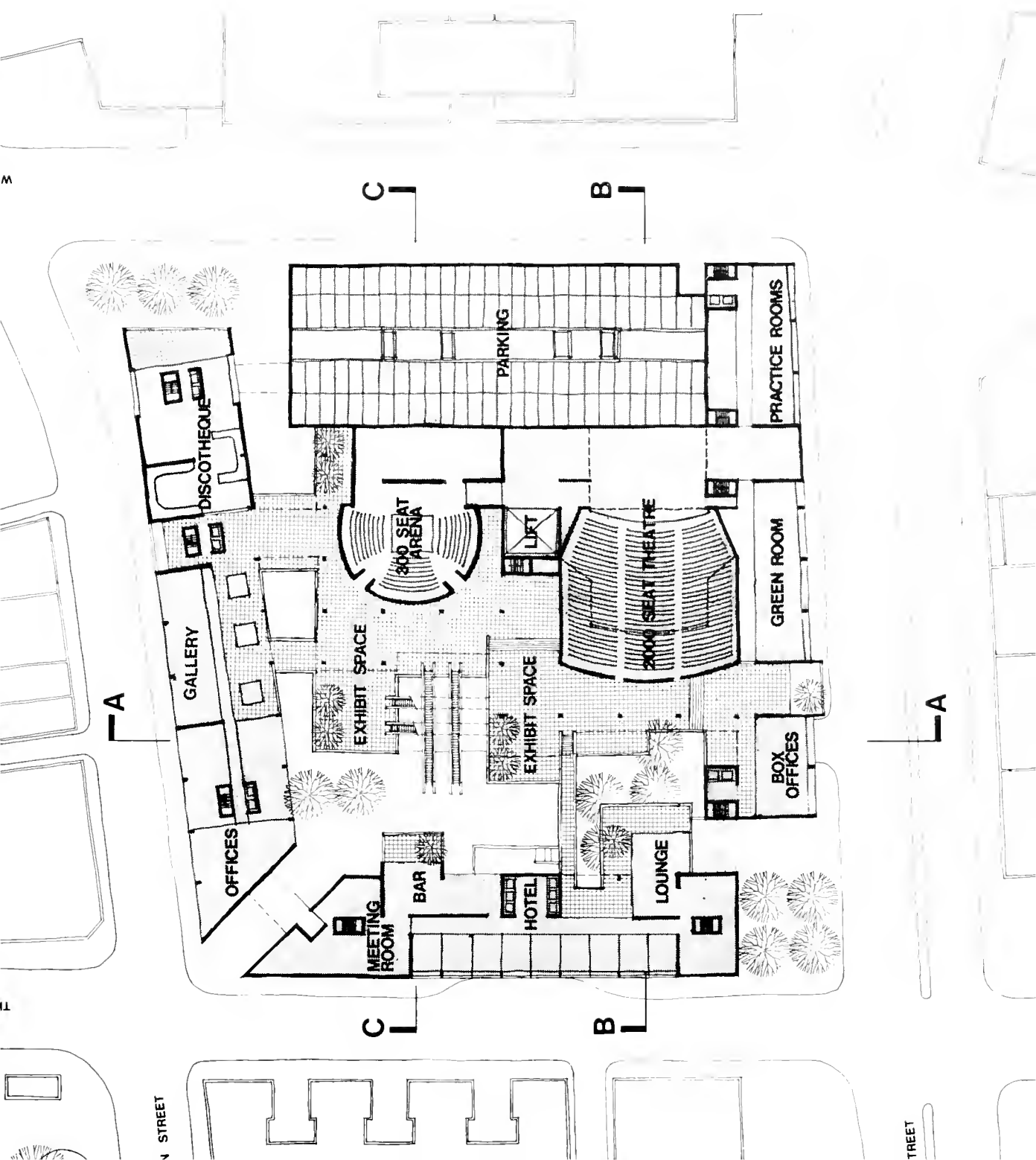
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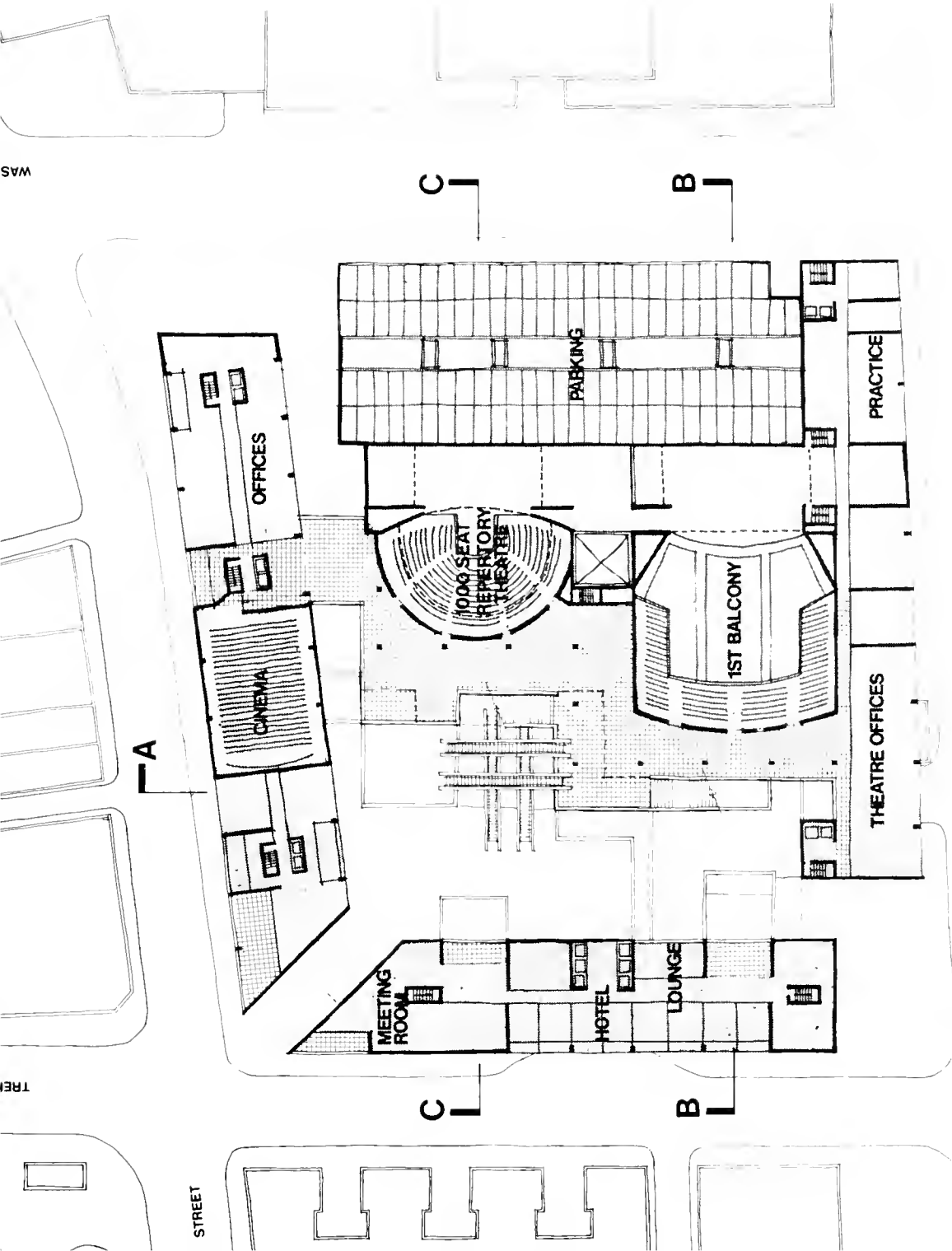


HINGE BLOCK

3

MAIN THEATRE
LEVEL





HINGE BLOCK

5

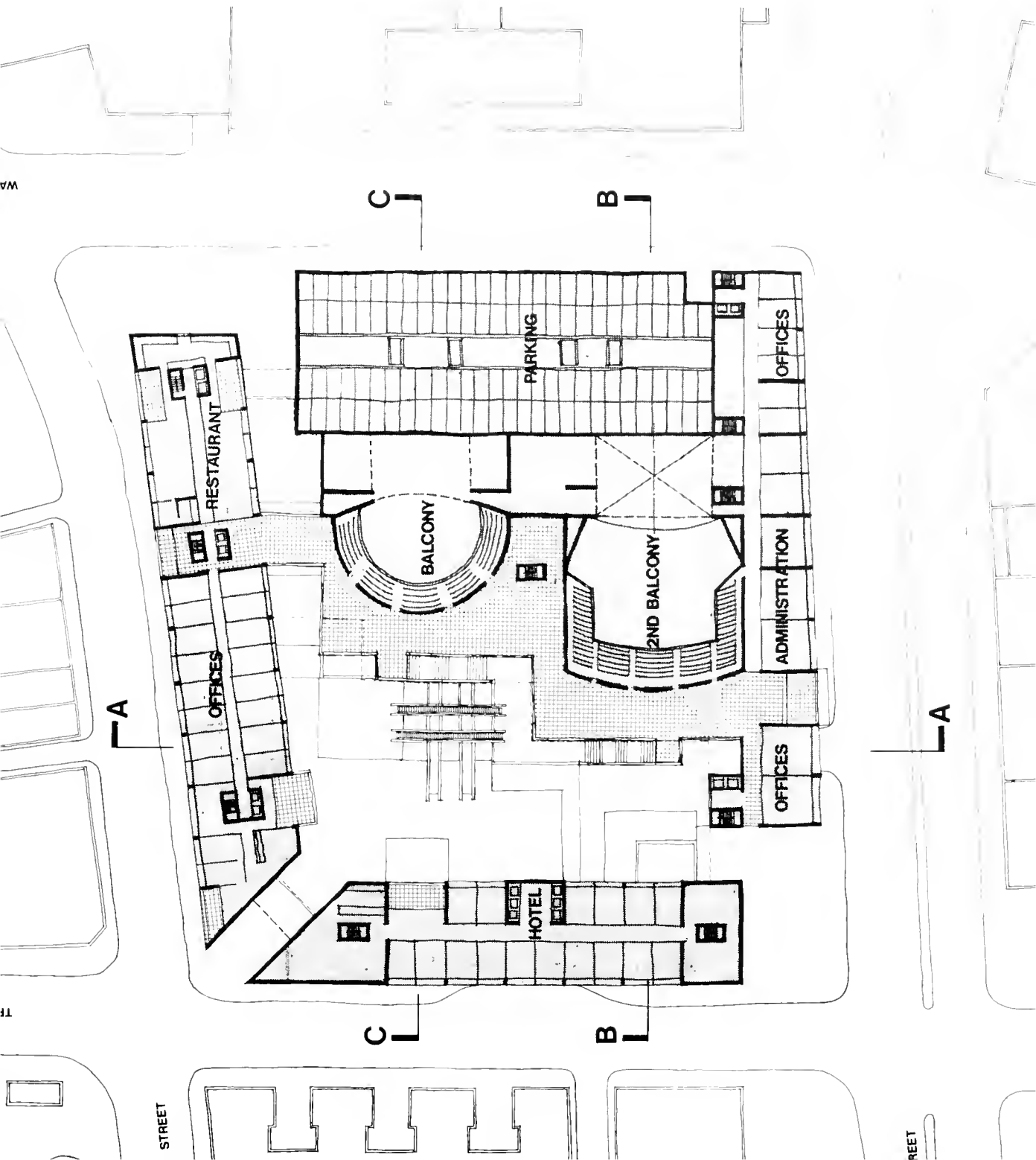
REPERTORY THEATRE
LEVEL



HINGE BLOCK

7

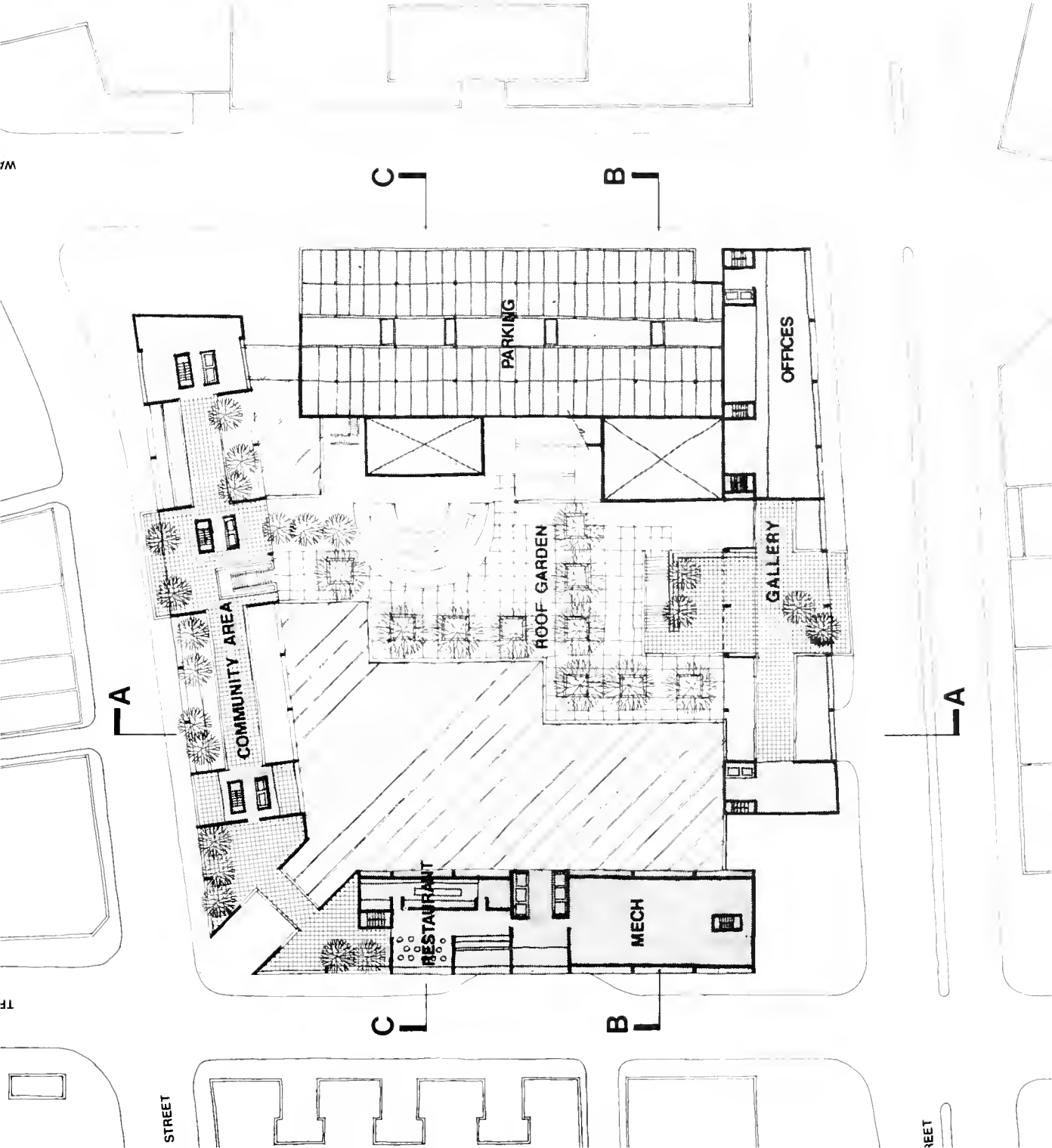
BALCONY
LEVEL



HINGE BLOCK

9

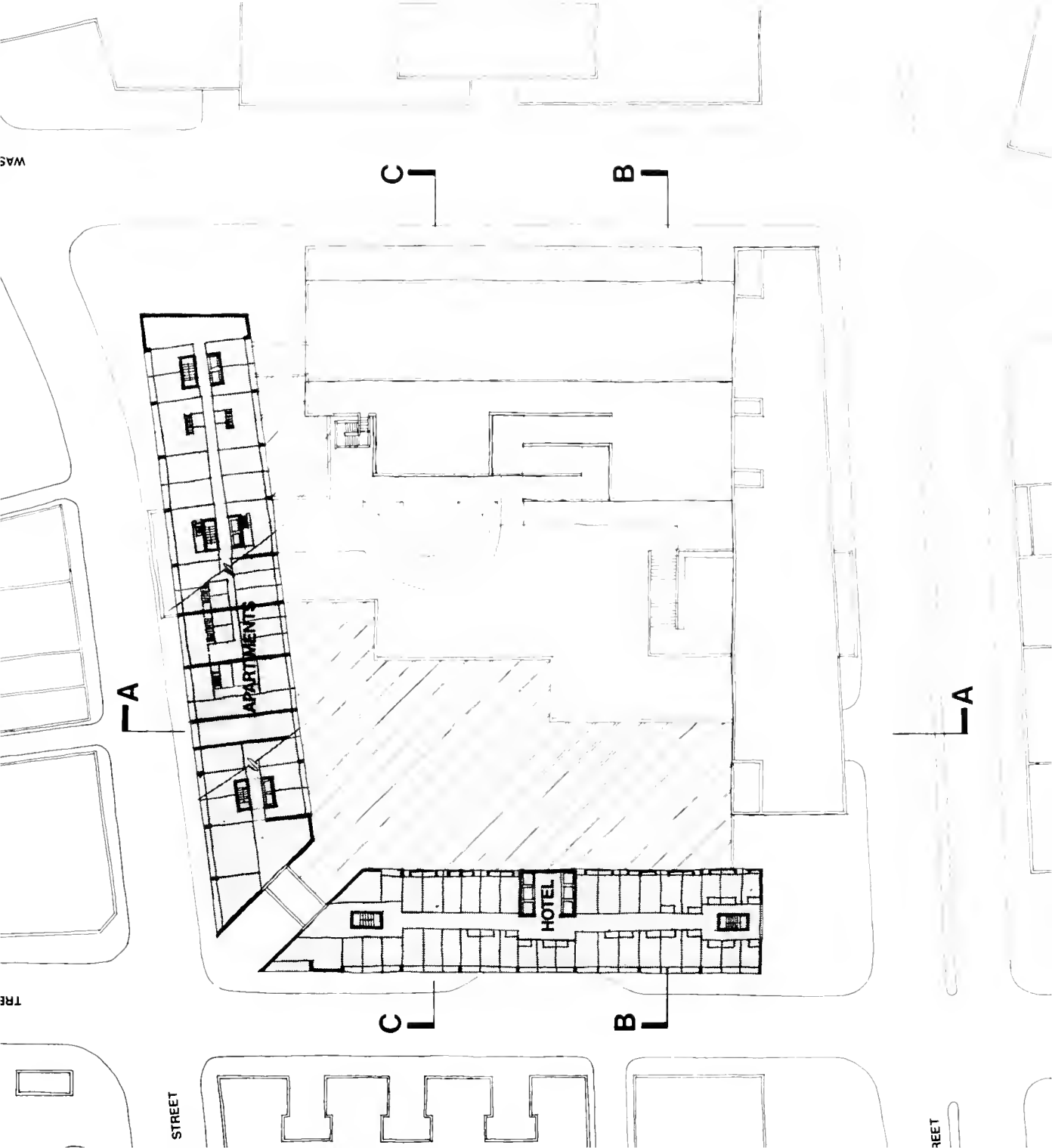
ROOF GARDEN
LEVEL

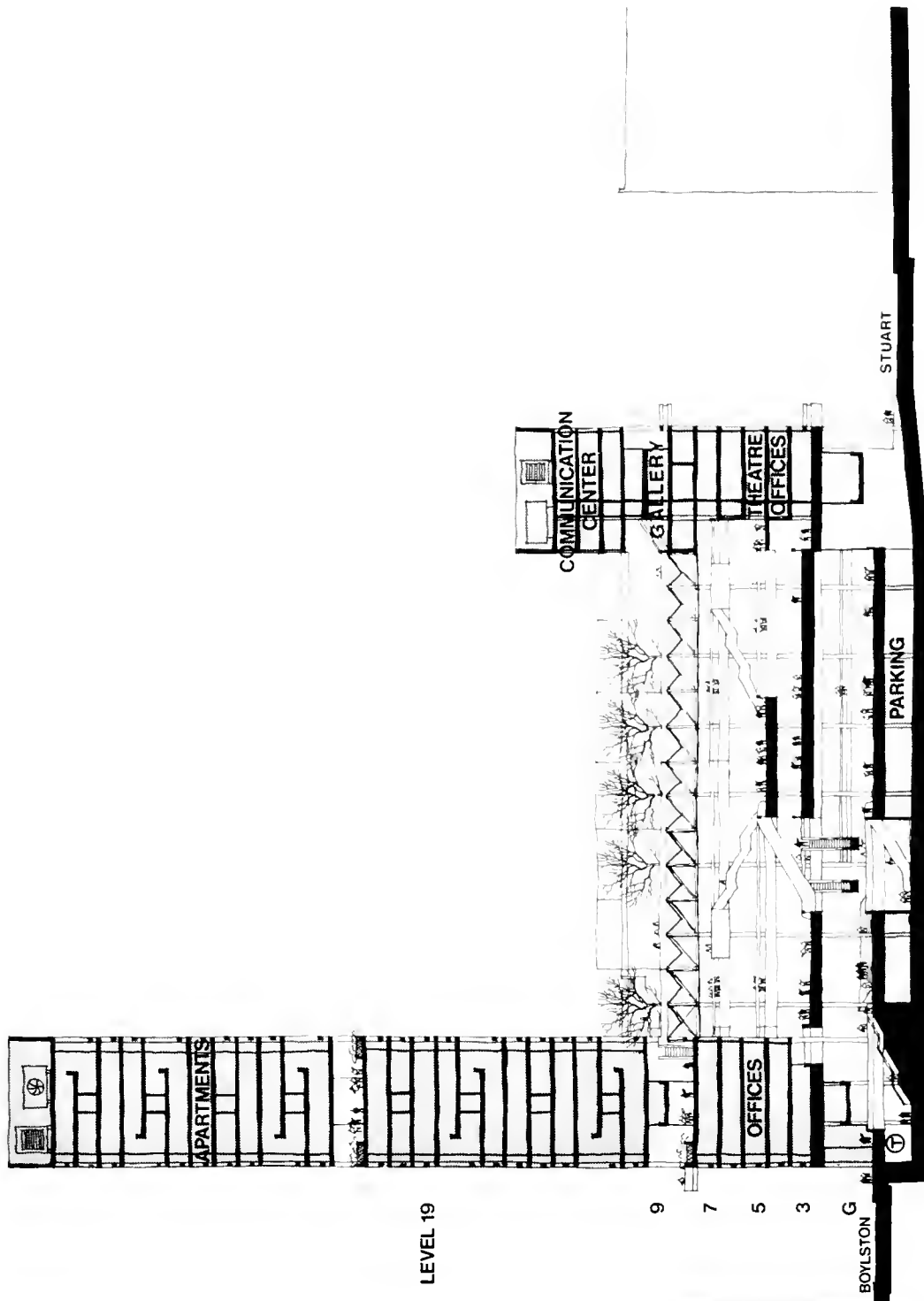


HINGE BLOCK

19

HOUSING · HOTEL
LEVEL

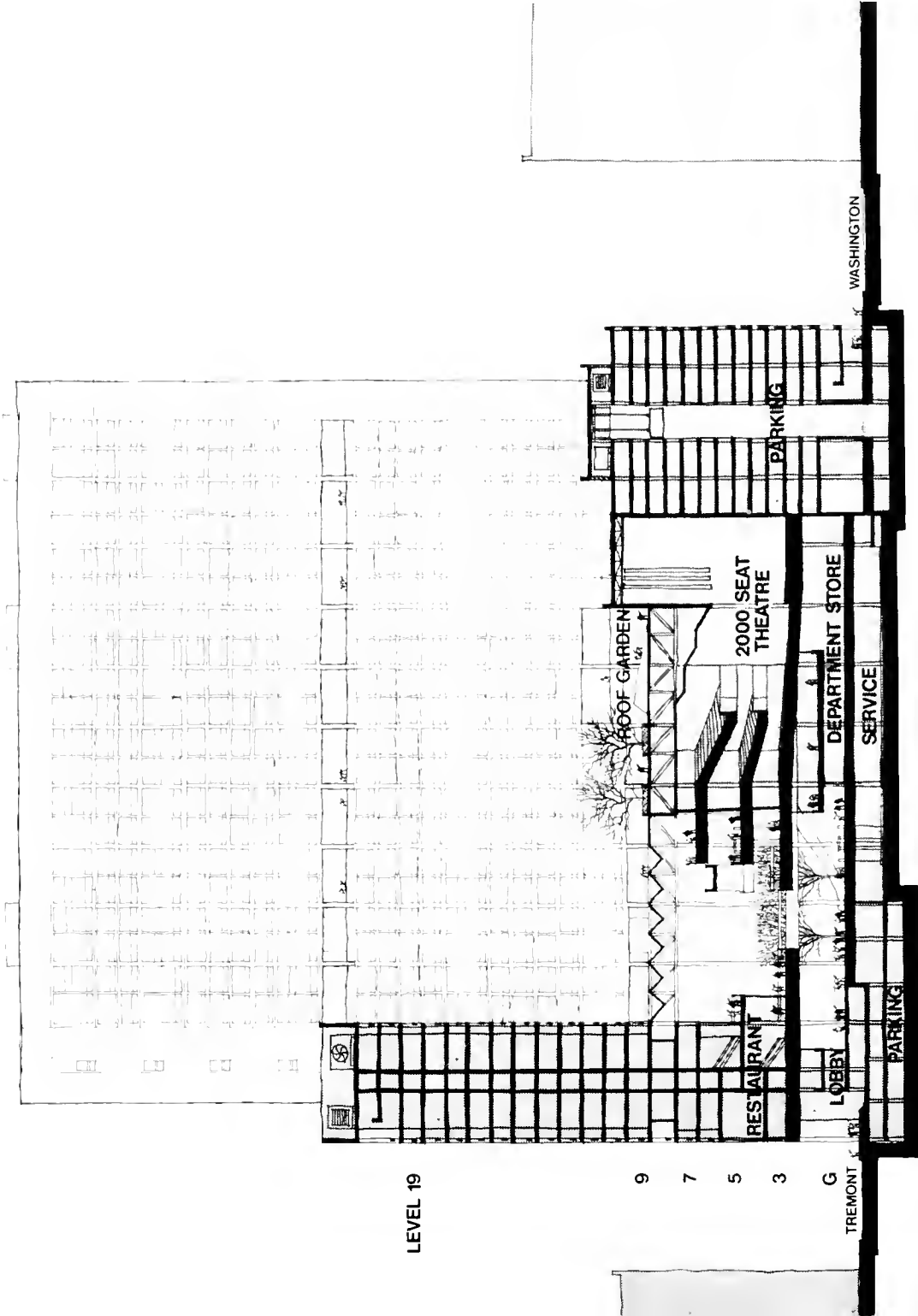




HINGE BLOCK

A-A SECTION





LEVEL 19

9
7
5
3
G

TREMONT

WASHINGTON

RESTAURANT

LOBBY

ROOF GARDEN

2000 SEAT
THEATRE

DEPARTMENT STORE

SERVICE

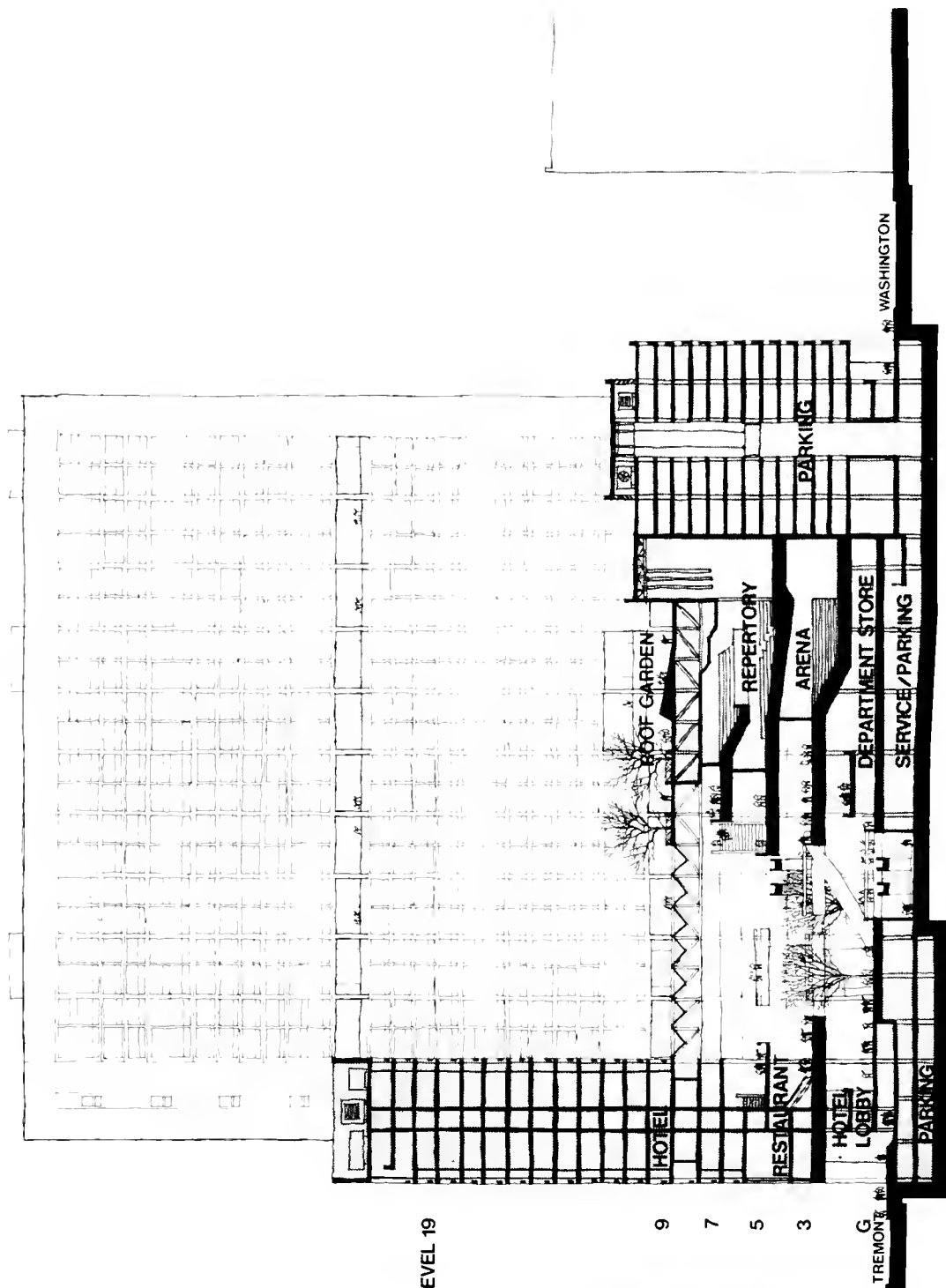
PARKING

PARKING

HINGE BLOCK

B-B SECTION





LEVEL 19

9
7
5
3
G
TREMONT ST

HINGE BLOCK

C-C
SECTION



Administration

The general goal of the central administration will be to make excellent space available at the lowest possible cost and to establish and maintain an environment in which all arts groups, existing and new, large and small, will be stimulated toward maximum development and expression of their creative abilities.

Arts facilities within the complex will be leased at \$1 per year, to a non-profit administrative organization, headed by a board of trustees. The trustees of the cultural complex will be responsible for selection of tenants for the space for cultural use. An organization of the tenant cultural groups will be responsible for carrying out the policies and procedures set down by the trustees. These policies will include agreements to pool certain administrative functions such as tickets and promotional activity, participation in a joint appeal for support from the corporate community, and agreement to abide by generally agreed upon accounting principles. Any profits that might accrue from these rentals may be used to promote the arts in general ways throughout greater Boston, including the provision of free or low-priced tickets to school children and low-income groups.

Coordination of these and other activities by the central administration will not, on the other hand, include interference with the independent organizational structure and artistic activity of each individual group. Each artistic group will continue to have its own board of trustees, artistic director, producer, subscriber and patron lists.

Financing And Development

The next step toward the realization of this project is to create a development program that can be offered, with the site, to interested private developers by the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

It is anticipated at this time that the private developer who builds the complex would be selected through the normal competitive procedures of the city's renewal program.

In order for the project to be made financially attractive to developers, inducements must be offered. Some of these have already been mentioned, above all the opportunity to construct, in a potentially high rent area with heavy demand, large areas of commercial and office space, as well as substantial numbers of hotel and apartment units. Exact proportions of these and other uses, and the range of flexibility that can be offered to developers will be determined with the help of detailed market and cost analyses.

Developers will also need to be offered appropriate zoning relief, low land cost, and tax relief in regard to the main public space and non-profit facilities.

In the next phase of this project, relative proportions of land uses, financing, development, and administration must be extensively studied in order to first make this proposal feasible, and then, ultimately, to make it move forward toward reality.

Boston Study Group Foundation

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